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# RIVERS TO THE SEA



THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

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TORONTO

# RIVERS TO THE SEA

BY

SARA TEASDALE

New York

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

1919

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**To**  
**ERNST**





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**I**





# RIVERS TO THE SEA

## SPRING NIGHT

THE park is filled with night and fog,  
The veils are drawn about the world,  
The drowsy lights along the paths  
Are dim and pearled.

Gold and gleaming the empty streets,  
Gold and gleaming the misty lake,  
The mirrored lights like sunken swords,  
Glimmer and shake.

Oh, is it not enough to be  
Here with this beauty over me?  
My throat should ache with praise, and I  
Should kneel in joy beneath the sky.  
Oh, beauty are you not enough?

## RIVERS TO THE SEA

Why am I crying after love  
With youth, a singing voice and eyes  
To take earth's wonder with surprise?  
Why have I put off my pride,  
Why am I unsatisfied,  
I for whom the pensive night  
Binds her cloudy hair with light,  
I for whom all beauty burns  
Like incense in a million urns?  
Oh, beauty, are you not enough?  
Why am I crying after love?

## THE FLIGHT

Look back with longing eyes and know that I will  
follow,

Lift me up in your love as a light wind lifts a swallow,

Let our flight be far in sun or windy rain —

*But what if I heard my first love calling me again?*

Hold me on your heart as the brave sea holds the  
foam,

Take me far away to the hills that hide your home ;

Peace shall thatch the roof and love shall latch the  
door —

*But what if I heard my first love calling me once more?*

## NEW LOVE AND OLD

IN my heart the old love  
Struggled with the new ;  
It was ghostly waking  
All night thru.

Dear things, kind things,  
That my old love said,  
Ranged themselves reproachfully :  
Round my bed.

But I could not heed them,  
For I seemed to see  
The eyes of my new love  
Fixed on me.

Old love, old love,  
How can I be true ?  
Shall I be faithless to myself  
Or to you ?

## THE LOOK

STREPHON kissed me in the spring,  
Robin in the fall,  
But Colin only looked at me  
And never kissed at all.

Strephon's kiss was lost in jest,  
Robin's lost in play,  
But the kiss in Colin's eyes  
Haunts me night and day.

## SPRING

IN Central Park the lovers sit,  
On every hilly path they stroll,  
Each thinks his love is infinite,  
And crowns his soul.

But we are cynical and wise,  
We walk a careful foot apart,  
You make a little joke that tries  
To hide your heart.

Give over, we have laughed enough ;  
Oh dearest and most foolish friend,  
Why do you wage a war with love  
To lose your battle in the end ?

## THE LIGHTED WINDOW

*He said:*

"In the winter dusk

When the pavements were gleaming with rain,

I walked thru a dingy street

Hurried, harassed,

Thinking of all my problems that never are  
solved.

Suddenly out of the mist, a flaring gas-jet

Shone from a huddled shop.

I saw thru the bleary window

A mass of playthings:

False-faces hung on strings,

Valentines, paper and tinsel,

Tops of scarlet and green,

Candy, marbles, jacks —

A confusion of color

Pathetically gaudy and cheap.

All of my boyhood



## RIVERS TO THE SEA

Rushed back.

Once more these things were treasures

Wildly desired.

With covetous eyes I looked again at the marbles,

The precious agates, the pee-wees, the chinies —

Then I passed on.

In the winter dusk,

The pavements were gleaming with rain;

There in the lighted window

I left my boyhood."

## THE KISS

BEFORE you kissed me only winds of heaven  
Had kissed me, and the tenderness of rain —  
Now you have come, how can I care for kisses  
Like theirs again?

I sought the sea, she sent her winds to meet me,  
They surged about me singing of the south —  
I turned my head away to keep still holy  
Your kiss upon my mouth.

And swift sweet rains of shining April weather  
Found not my lips where living kisses are;  
I bowed my head lest they put out my glory  
As rain puts out a star.

I am my love's and he is mine forever,  
Sealed with a seal and safe forevermore —  
Think you that I could let a beggar enter  
Where a king stood before?

## SWANS

NIGHT is over the park, and a few brave stars

Look on the lights that link it with chains of  
gold,

The lake bears up their reflection in broken bars

That seem too heavy for tremulous water to  
hold.

We watch the swans that sleep in a shadowy  
place,

And now and again one wakes and uplifts its  
head;

How still you are — your gaze is on my face —

We watch the swans and never a word is said.

## THE OLD MAID

I SAW her in a Broadway car,  
The woman I might grow to be;  
I felt my lover look at her  
And then turn suddenly to me.

Her hair was dull and drew no light  
And yet its color was as mine;  
Her eyes were strangely like my eyes  
Tho' love had never made them shine.

Her body was a thing grown thin,  
Hungry for love that never came;  
Her soul was frozen in the dark  
Unwarmed forever by love's flame.

I felt my lover look at her  
And then turn suddenly to me, —  
His eyes were magic to defy  
The woman I shall never be.

## FROM THE WOOLWORTH TOWER

VIVID with love, eager for greater beauty  
Out of the night we come  
Into the corridor, brilliant and warm.

A metal door slides open,  
And the lift receives us.

Swiftly, with sharp unswerving flight  
The car shoots upward,

And the air, swirling and angry,  
Howls like a hundred devils.

Past the maze of trim bronze doors,  
Steadily we ascend.

I cling to you  
Conscious of the chasm under us,  
And a terrible whirring deafens my ears.

The flight is ended.

We pass thru a door leading onto the ledge –

## RIVERS TO THE SEA

Wind, night and space !  
Oh terrible height  
Why have we sought you ?  
Oh bitter wind with icy invisible wings  
Why do you beat us ?  
Why would you bear us away ?  
We look thru the miles of air,  
The cold blue miles between us and the city,  
Over the edge of eternity we look  
On all the lights,  
A thousand times more numerous than the stars ;  
Oh lines and loops of light in unwound chains  
That mark for miles and miles  
The vast black mazy cobweb of the streets ;  
Near us clusters and splashes of living gold  
That change far off to bluish steel  
Where the fragile lights on the Jersey shore  
Tremble like drops of wind-stirred dew.  
The strident noises of the city  
Floating up to us

## RIVERS TO THE SEA

Are hallowed into whispers.

Ferries cross thru the darkness

Weaving a golden thread into the night,

Their whistles weird shadows of sound.

We feel the millions of humanity beneath us, —

The warm millions, moving under the roofs,

Consumed by their own desires ;

Preparing food,

Sobbing alone in a garret,

With burning eyes bending over a needle,

Aimlessly reading the evening paper,

Dancing in the naked light of the café,

Laying out the dead,

Bringing a child to birth —

The sorrow, the torpor, the bitterness, the frail joy

Come up to us

Like a cold fog wrapping us round.

Oh in a hundred years

Not one of these blood-warm bodies

## RIVERS TO THE SEA

But will be worthless as clay.  
The anguish, the torpor, the toil  
Will have passed to other millions  
Consumed by the same desires.  
Ages will come and go,  
Darkness will blot the lights  
And the tower will be laid on the earth.  
The sea will remain  
Black and unchanging,  
The stars will look down  
Brilliant and unconcerned.

Beloved,  
Tho' sorrow, futility, defeat  
Surround us,  
They cannot bear us down.  
Here on the abyss of eternity  
Love has crowned us  
For a moment  
Victors.



## AT NIGHT

WE are apart; the city grows quiet between us,  
She hushes herself, for midnight makes heavy  
her eyes,

The tangle of traffic is ended, the cars are empty,  
Five streets divide us, and on them the moon-  
light lies.

Oh are you asleep, or lying awake, my lover?

Open your dreams to my love and your heart  
to my words,

I send you my thoughts — the air between us is  
laden,

My thoughts fly in at your window, a flock of  
wild birds.

## THE YEARS

TO-NIGHT I close my eyes and see  
A strange procession passing me —  
The years before I saw your face  
Go by me with a wistful grace ;  
They pass, the sensitive shy years,  
As one who strives to dance, half blind  
with tears.

The years went by and never knew  
That each one brought me nearer you ;  
Their path was narrow and apart  
And yet it led me to your heart —  
Oh sensitive shy years, oh lonely years,  
That strove to sing with voices drowned  
in tears.

## PEACE

PEACE flows into me

As the tide to the pool by the  
shore;

It is mine forevermore,  
It ebbs not back like the sea.

I am the pool of blue

That worships the vivid sky;  
My hopes were heaven-high,  
They are all fulfilled in you.

I am the pool of gold

When sunset burns and dies, —  
You are my deepening skies,  
Give me your stars to hold.

## APRIL

THE roofs are shining from the rain,  
The sparrows twitter as they fly,  
And with a windy April grace  
The little clouds go by.

Yet the back-yards are bare and brown  
With only one unchanging tree —  
I could not be so sure of Spring  
Save that it sings in me.

## COME

COME, when the pale moon like a petal  
    Floats in the pearly dusk of spring,  
Come with arms outstretched to take me,  
    Come with lips pursed up to cling.

Come, for life is a frail moth flying  
    Caught in the web of the years that pass,  
And soon we two, so warm and eager  
    Will be as the gray stones in the grass.

## MOODS

I AM the still rain falling,  
Too tired for singing mirth —  
Oh, be the green fields calling,  
Oh, be for me the earth !

I am the brown bird pining  
To leave the nest and fly —  
Oh, be the fresh cloud shining,  
Oh, be for me the sky !

## APRIL SONG

WILLOW in your April gown  
Delicate and gleaming,  
Do you mind in years gone by  
All my dreaming?

Spring was like a call to me  
That I could not answer,  
I was chained to loneliness,  
I, the dancer.

Willow, twinkling in the sun,  
Still your leaves and hear me,  
I can answer spring at last,  
Love is near me !

## MAY DAY

THE shining line of motors,  
The swaying motor-bus,  
The prancing dancing horses  
Are passing by for us.

The sunlight on the steeple,  
The toys we stop to see,  
The smiling passing people  
Are all for you and me.

"I love you and I love you!" —  
"And oh, I love you, too!" —  
"All of the flower girl's lilies  
Were only grown for you!"

Fifth Avenue and April  
And love and lack of care —  
The world is mad with music  
Too beautiful to bear.



## CROWNED

I WEAR a crown invisible and clear,  
And go my lifted royal way apart  
Since you have crowned me softly in your  
heart  
With love that is half ardent, half austere;  
And as a queen disguised might pass anear  
The bitter crowd that barterers in a mart,  
Veiling her pride while tears of pity start,  
I hide my glory thru a jealous fear.  
My crown shall stay a sweet and secret thing  
Kept pure with prayer at evensong and  
morn,  
And when you come to take it from my  
head,  
I shall not weep, nor will a word be said,  
But I shall kneel before you, oh my king,  
And bind my brow forever with a thorn.

## TO A CASTILIAN SONG

WE held the book together timidly,  
Whose antique music in an alien tongue  
Once rose among the dew-drenched vines that  
hung  
Beneath a high Castilian balcony.  
I felt the lute strings' ancient ecstasy,  
And while he read, my love-filled heart was  
stung,  
And throbbed, as where an ardent bird has  
clung  
The branches tremble on a blossomed tree.  
Oh lady for whose sake the song was made,  
Laid long ago in some still cypress shade,  
Divided from the man who longed for thee,  
Here in a land whose name he never heard,  
His song brought love as April brings the  
bird,  
And not a breath divides my love from me!

## BROADWAY

THIS is the quiet hour; the theaters  
Have gathered in their crowds, and steadily  
The million lights blaze on for few to see,  
Robbing the sky of stars that should be hers.  
A woman waits with bag and shabby furs,  
A somber man drifts by, and only we  
Pass up the street unwearied, warm and free,  
For over us the olden magic stirs.  
Beneath the liquid splendor of the lights  
We live a little ere the charm is spent;  
This night is ours, of all the golden nights,  
The pavement an enchanted palace floor,  
And Youth the player on the viol, who sent  
A strain of music thru an open door.

## A WINTER BLUEJAY

CRISPLY the bright snow whispered,  
Crunching beneath our feet ;  
Behind us as we walked along the parkway,  
Our shadows danced,  
Fantastic shapes in vivid blue.  
Across the lake the skaters  
Flew to and fro,  
With sharp turns weaving  
A frail invisible net.  
In ecstasy the earth  
Drank the silver sunlight ;  
In ecstasy the skaters  
Drank the wine of speed ;  
In ecstasy we laughed  
Drinking the wine of love.  
Had not the music of our joy  
Sounded its highest note ?  
But no,

## RIVERS TO THE SEA

For suddenly, with lifted eyes you said,

“Oh look !”

There, on the black bough of a snow flecked  
maple,

Fearless and gay as our love,

A bluejay cocked his crest !

Oh who can tell the range of joy

Or set the bounds of beauty?

## IN A RESTAURANT

THE darkened street was muffled with the snow,  
The falling flakes had made your shoulders  
white,

And when we found a shelter from the night  
Its glamor fell upon us like a blow.

The clash of dishes and the viol and bow  
Mingled beneath the fever of the light.

The heat was full of savors, and the bright  
Laughter of women lured the wine to flow.

A little child ate nothing while she sat

Watching a woman at a table there  
Lean to a kiss beneath a drooping hat.

The hour went by, we rose and turned to go,  
The somber street received us from the glare,  
And once more on your shoulders fell the  
snow.

## JOY

I AM wild, I will sing to the trees,  
I will sing to the stars in the sky,  
I love, I am loved, he is mine,  
Now at last I can die !

I am sandaled with wind and with flame,  
I have heart-fire and singing to give,  
I can tread on the grass or the stars,  
Now at last I can live !

## IN A RAILROAD STATION

WE stood in the shrill electric light,  
Dumb and sick in the whirling din —  
We who had all of love to say  
And a single second to say it in.

“Good-by !” “Good-by !” — you turned to  
go,

I felt the train’s slow heavy start, —  
You thought to see me cry, but oh  
My tears were hidden in my heart.



## IN THE TRAIN

FIELDS beneath a quilt of snow  
From which the rocks and stubble peep,  
And in the west a shy white star  
That shivers as it wakes from sleep.

The restless rumble of the train,  
The drowsy people in the car,  
Steel blue twilight in the world,  
And in my heart a timid star.

## TO ONE AWAY

I HEARD a cry in the night,  
A thousand miles it came,  
Sharp as a flash of light,  
My name, my name !

It was your voice I heard,  
You waked and loved me so -  
I send you back this word,  
I know, I know !

## SONG

Love me with your whole heart  
Or give no love to me,  
Half-love is a poor thing,  
Neither bond nor free.

You must love me gladly  
Soul and body too,  
Or else find a new love,  
And good-by to you.

## DEEP IN THE NIGHT

DEEP in the night the cry of a swallow,  
Under the stars he flew,  
Keen as pain was his call to follow  
Over the world to you.

Love in my heart is a cry forever  
Lost as the swallow's flight,  
Seeking for you and never, never  
Stilled by the stars at night.

## THE INDIA WHARF

HERE in the velvet stillness  
The wide sown fields fall to the faint horizon,  
Sleeping in starlight. . . .

A year ago we walked in the jangling city  
Together . . . . forgetful.  
One by one we crossed the avenues,  
Rivers of light, roaring in tumult,  
And came to the narrow, knotted streets.  
Thru the tense crowd  
We went aloof, ecstatic, walking in wonder,  
Unconscious of our motion.  
Forever the foreign people with dark, deep-  
    seeing eyes  
Passed us and passed.  
Lights and foreign words and foreign faces,  
I forgot them all ;

## RIVERS TO THE SEA

I only felt alive, defiant of all death and sorrow,  
Sure and elated.

That was the gift you gave me. . . .

The streets grew still more tangled,  
And led at last to water black and glossy,  
Flecked here and there with lights, faint and  
far off.

There on a shabby building was a sign  
"The India Wharf" . . . and we turned back.

I always felt we could have taken ship  
And crossed the bright green seas  
To dreaming cities set on sacred streams  
And palaces  
Of ivory and scarlet.

## I SHALL NOT CARE

WHEN I am dead and over me bright April  
Shakes out her rain-drenched hair,  
Tho' you should lean above me broken-hearted,  
I shall not care.

I shall have peace, as leafy trees are peaceful  
When rain bends down the bough,  
And I shall be more silent and cold-hearted  
Than you are now.

## DESERT POOLS

I LOVE too much; I am a river  
    Surging with spring that seeks the sea,  
I am too generous a giver,  
    Love will not stoop to drink of me.

His feet will turn to desert places  
    Shadowless, reft of rain and dew,  
Where stars stare down with sharpened faces  
    From heavens pitilessly blue.

And there at midnight sick with faring,  
    He will stoop down in his desire  
To slake the thirst grown past all bearing  
    In stagnant water keen as fire.



## LONGING

I AM not sorry for my soul  
That it must go unsatisfied,  
For it can live a thousand times,  
Eternity is deep and wide.

I am not sorry for my soul,  
But oh, my body that must go  
Back to a little drift of dust  
Without the joy it longed to know.

## PITY

THEY never saw my lover's face,  
They only know our love was brief,  
Wearing awhile a windy grace  
And passing like an autumn leaf.

They wonder why I do not weep,  
They think it strange that I can sing,  
They say, "Her love was scarcely deep  
Since it has left so slight a sting."

They never saw my love, nor knew  
That in my heart's most secret place  
I pity them as angels do  
Men who have never seen God's face.

## AFTER PARTING

OH I have sown my love so wide  
That he will find it everywhere;  
It will awake him in the night,  
It will enfold him in the air.

I set my shadow in his sight  
And I have winged it with desire,  
That it may be a cloud by day  
And in the night a shaft of fire.

## ENOUGH

It is enough for me by day

To walk the same bright earth with him ;

Enough that over us by night

The same great roof of stars is dim.

I have no care to bind the wind

Or set a fetter on the sea —

It is enough to feel his love

Blow by like music over me.

## ALCHEMY

I LIFT my heart as spring lifts up  
A yellow daisy to the rain;  
My heart will be a lovely cup  
Altho' it holds but pain.

For I shall learn from flower and leaf  
That color every drop they hold,  
To change the lifeless wine of grief  
To living gold.

## FEBRUARY

THEY spoke of him I love  
With cruel words and gay;  
My lips kept silent guard  
On all I could not say.

I heard, and down the street  
The lonely trees in the square  
Stood in the winter wind  
Patient and bare.

I heard . . . oh voiceless trees  
Under the wind, I knew  
The eager terrible spring  
Hidden in you.

## MORNING

I WENT out on an April morning  
All alone, for my heart was high,  
I was a child of the shining meadow,  
I was a sister of the sky.

There in the windy flood of morning  
Longing lifted its weight from me,  
Lost as a sob in the midst of cheering,  
Swept as a sea-bird out to sea.

## MAY NIGHT

THE spring is fresh and fearless  
And every leaf is new,  
The world is brimmed with moonlight,  
The lilac brimmed with dew.

Here in the moving shadows  
I catch my breath and sing —  
My heart is fresh and fearless  
And over-brimmed with spring.



## DUSK IN JUNE

EVENING, and all the birds

In a chorus of shimmering sound  
Are easing their hearts of joy  
For miles around.

The air is blue and sweet,

The few first stars are white, —  
Oh let me like the birds  
Sing before night.

## LOVE-FREE

I AM free of love as a bird flying south in the  
autumn,

Swift and intent, asking no joy from another,

Glad to forget all of the passion of April

Ere it was love-free.

I am free of love, and I listen to music lightly,

But if he returned, if he should look at me deeply,

I should awake, I should awake and remember

I am my lover's.

## SUMMER NIGHT, RIVERSIDE

IN the wild soft summer darkness  
How many and many a night we two together  
Sat in the park and watched the Hudson  
Wearing her lights like golden spangles  
Glinting on black satin.

The rail along the curving pathway  
Was low in a happy place to let us cross,  
And down the hill a tree that dripped with bloom  
Sheltered us  
While your kisses and the flowers,  
Falling, falling,  
Tangled my hair. . . .

The frail white stars moved slowly over the sky.  
  
And now, far off  
In the fragrant darkness  
The tree is tremulous again with bloom  
For June comes back.

## RIVERS TO THE SEA

To-night what girl

When she goes home,

Dreamily before her mirror shakes from her  
hair

This year's blossoms, clinging in its coils?

## IN A SUBWAY STATION

AFTER a year I came again to the place ;  
The tireless lights and the reverberation,  
The angry thunder of trains that burrow the ground,  
The hunted, hurrying people were still the same —  
But oh, another man beside me and not you !  
Another voice and other eyes in mine !  
And suddenly I turned and saw again  
The gleaming curve of tracks, the bridge above —  
They were burned deep into my heart before,  
The night I watched them to avoid your eyes,  
When you were saying, "Oh, look up at me!"  
When you were saying, "Will you never love me?"  
And when I answered with a lie. Oh then  
You dropped your eyes. I felt your utter pain.  
I would have died to say the truth to you.

\* \* \* \* \*

After a year I came again to the place —  
The hunted hurrying people were still the same. . . .

## AFTER LOVE

THERE is no magic when we meet,  
We speak as other people do,  
You work no miracle for me  
Nor I for you.

You were the wind and I the sea —  
There is no splendor any more,  
I have grown listless as the pool  
Beside the shore.

But tho' the pool is safe from storm  
And from the tide has found surcease,  
It grows more bitter than the sea,  
For all its peace.

## DOORYARD ROSES

I HAVE come the selfsame path  
To the selfsame door,  
Years have left the roses there  
Burning as before.

While I watch them in the wind  
Quick the hot tears start —  
Strange so frail a flame outlasts  
Fire in the heart.

## A PRAYER

UNTIL I lose my soul and lie  
Blind to the beauty of the earth,  
Deaf tho' a lyric wind goes by,  
Dumb in a storm of mirth;

Until my heart is quenched at length  
And I have left the land of men,  
Oh let me love with all my strength  
Careless if I am loved again.









## INDIAN SUMMER

LYRIC night of the lingering Indian Summer,  
Shadowy fields that are scentless but full of singing,  
Never a bird, but the passionless chant of insects,  
Ceaseless, insistent.

The grasshopper's horn, and far off, high in the  
maples  
The wheel of a locust leisurely grinding the silence,  
Under a moon waning and worn and broken,  
Tired with summer.

Let me remember you, voices of little insects,  
Weeds in the moonlight, fields that are tangled  
with asters,  
Let me remember you, soon will the winter be on  
us,  
Snow-hushed and heartless.

## RIVERS TO THE SEA

Over my soul murmur your mute benediction  
While I gaze, oh fields that rest after harvest,  
As those who part look long in the eyes they lean  
to,  
Lest they forget them.

## THE SEA WIND

I AM a pool in a peaceful place,  
I greet the great sky face to face,  
I know the stars and the stately moon  
And the wind that runs with rippling shoon —  
But why does it always bring to me  
The far-off, beautiful sound of the sea?

The marsh-grass weaves me a wall of green,  
But the wind comes whispering in between,  
In the dead of night when the sky is deep  
The wind comes waking me out of sleep —  
Why does it always bring to me  
The far-off, terrible call of the sea?

## THE CLOUD

I AM a cloud in the heaven's height,  
The stars are lit for my delight,  
Tireless and changeful, swift and free,  
I cast my shadow on hill and sea —  
But why do the pines on the mountain's crest  
Call to me always, "Rest, rest"?

I throw my mantle over the moon  
And I blind the sun on his throne at noon,  
Nothing can tame me, nothing can bind,  
I am a child of the heartless wind —  
But oh the pines on the mountain's crest  
Whispering always, "Rest, rest."

## THE POOR HOUSE

HOPE went by and Peace went by  
And would not enter in ;  
Youth went by and Health went by  
And Love that is their kin.

Those within the house shed tears  
On their bitter bread ;  
Some were old and some were mad,  
And some were sick a-bed.

Gray Death saw the wretched house  
And even he passed by —  
“They have never lived,” he said,  
“They can wait to die.”



## NEW YEAR'S DAWN — BROADWAY

WHEN the horns wear thin  
And the noise, like a garment outworn,  
Falls from the night,  
The tattered and shivering night,  
That thinks she is gay;  
When the patient silence comes back,  
And retires,  
And returns,  
Rebuffed by a ribald song,  
Wounded by vehement cries,  
Fleeing again to the stars —  
Ashamed of her sister the night;  
Oh, then they steal home,  
The blinded, the pitiful ones  
With their gew-gaws still in their hands,  
Reeling with odorous breath  
And thick, coarse words on their tongues.  
They get them to bed, somehow,

## RIVERS TO THE SEA

And sleep the forgiving,  
Comes thru the scattering tumult  
And closes their eyes.  
The stars sink down ashamed  
And the dawn awakes,  
Like a youth who steals from a brothel,  
Dizzy and sick.

## THE STAR

A WHITE star born in the evening glow  
Looked to the round green world below,  
And saw a pool in a wooded place  
That held like a jewel her mirrored face.  
She said to the pool: "Oh, wondrous deep,  
I love you, I give you my light to keep.  
Oh, more profound than the moving sea  
That never has shown myself to me!  
Oh, fathomless as the sky is far,  
Hold forever your tremulous star!"

But out of the woods as night grew cool  
A brown pig came to the little pool;  
It grunted and splashed and waded in  
And the deepest place but reached its chin.  
The water gurgled with tender glee  
And the mud churned up in it turbidly.  
The star grew pale and hid her face  
In a bit of floating cloud like lace.

## DOCTORS

EVERY night I lie awake  
And every day I lie abed  
And hear the doctors, Pain and Death,  
Conferring at my head.

They speak in scientific tones,  
Professional and low —  
One argues for a speedy cure,  
The other, sure and slow.

To one so humble as myself  
It should be matter for some pride  
To have such noted fellows here,  
Conferring at my side.

## THE INN OF EARTH

I CAME to the crowded Inn of Earth,  
And called for a cup of wine,  
But the Host went by with averted eye  
From a thirst as keen as mine.

Then I sat down with weariness  
And asked a bit of bread,  
But the Host went by with averted eye  
And never a word he said.

While always from the outer night  
The waiting souls came in  
With stifled cries of sharp surprise  
At all the light and din.

"Then give me a bed to sleep," I said,  
"For midnight comes apace" —  
But the Host went by with averted eye  
And I never saw his face.

RIVERS TO THE SEA,

“Since there is neither food nor rest,

I go where I fared before” —

But the Host went by with averted eye

And barred the outer door.

## IN THE CARPENTER'S SHOP

MARY sat in the corner dreaming,  
Dim was the room and low,  
While in the dusk, the saw went screaming  
To and fro.

Jesus and Joseph toiled together,  
Mary was watching them,  
Thinking of kings in the wintry weather  
At Bethlehem.

Mary sat in the corner thinking,  
Jesus had grown a man;  
One by one her hopes were sinking  
As the years ran.

Jesus and Joseph toiled together,  
Mary's thoughts were far —  
Angels sang in the wintry weather  
Under a star.

RIVERS TO THE SEA

Mary sat in the corner weeping,  
Bitter and hot her tears —  
Little faith were the angels keeping  
All the years.



## THE CARPENTER'S SON

THE summer dawn came over-soon,  
The earth was like hot iron at noon  
    In Nazareth ;  
There fell no rain to ease the heat,  
And dusk drew on with tired feet  
    And stifled breath.

The shop was low and hot and square,  
And fresh-cut wood made sharp the air,  
    While all day long  
The saw went tearing thru the oak  
That moaned as tho' the tree's heart broke  
    Beneath its wrong.

The narrow street was full of cries,  
Of bickering and snarling lies  
    In many keys —

## RIVERS TO THE SEA

The tongues of Egypt and of Rome  
And lands beyond the shifting foam  
Of windy seas.

Sometimes a ruler riding fast  
Scattered the dark crowds as he passed,  
And drove them close  
In doorways, drawing broken breath  
Lest they be trampled to their death  
Where the dust rose.

There in the gathering night and noise  
A group of Galilean boys  
Crowding to see  
Gray Joseph toiling with his son,  
Saw Jesus, when the task was done,  
Turn wearily.

He passed them by with hurried tread  
Silently, nor raised his head,  
He who looked up

## RIVERS TO THE SEA

Drinking all beauty from his birth  
Out of the heaven and the earth  
As from a cup.

And Mary, who was growing old,  
Knew that the pottage would be cold  
When he returned ;  
He hungered only for the night,  
And westward, bending sharp and bright,  
The thin moon burned.

He reached the open western gate  
Where whining halt and leper wait,  
And came at last  
To the blue desert, where the deep  
Great seas of twilight lay asleep,  
Windless and vast.

With shining eyes the stars awoke,  
The dew lay heavy on his cloak,  
The world was dim ;

## RIVERS TO THE SEA

And in the stillness he could hear  
His secret thoughts draw very near  
And call to him.

Faint voices lifted shrill with pain  
And multitudinous as rain ;  
From all the lands  
And all the villages thereof  
Men crying for the gift of love  
With outstretched hands.

Voices that called with ceaseless crying,  
The broken and the blind, the dying,  
And those grown dumb  
Beneath oppression, and he heard  
Upon their lips a single word,  
“Come !”

Their cries engulfed him like the night,  
The moon put out her placid light  
And black and low

## RIVERS TO THE SEA

Nearer the heavy thunder drew,  
Hushing the voices . . . yet he knew  
That he would go.

\*       \*       \*       \*       \*       \*

A quick-spun thread of lightning burns,  
And for a flash the day returns —  
He only hears  
Joseph, an old man bent and white  
Toiling alone from morn till night  
Thru all the years.

Swift clouds make all the heavens blind,  
A storm is running on the wind —  
He only sees  
How Mary will stretch out her hands  
Sobbing, who never understands  
Voices like these.

## THE MOTHER OF A POET

SHE is too kind, I think, for mortal things,  
Too gentle for the gusty ways of earth;  
God gave to her a shy and silver mirth,  
And made her soul as clear  
And softly singing as an orchard spring's  
In sheltered hollows all the sunny year —  
A spring that thru the leaning grass looks up  
And holds all heaven in its clarid cup,  
Mirror to holy meadows high and blue  
With stars like drops of dew.

I love to think that never tears at night  
Have made her eyes less bright;  
That all her girlhood thru  
Never a cry of love made over-tense  
Her voice's innocence;  
That in her hands have lain,  
Flowers beaten by the rain,

## RIVERS TO THE SEA

And little birds before they learned to sing  
Drowned in the sudden ecstasy of spring.

I love to think that with a wistful wonder  
She held her baby warm against her breast;  
That never any fear awoke whereunder  
She shuddered at her gift, or trembled lest  
Thru the great doors of birth  
Here to a windy earth  
She lured from heaven a half-unwilling guest.

She caught and kept his first vague flickering smile,  
The faint upleaping of his spirit's fire;  
And for a long sweet while  
In her was all he asked of earth or heaven —  
But in the end how far,  
Rast every shaken star,  
Should leap at last that arrow-like desire,  
His full-grown manhood's keen  
Ardor toward the unseen  
Dark mystery beyond the Pleiads seven.

## RIVERS TO THE SEA

And in her heart she heard  
His first dim-spoken word —  
She only of them all could understand,  
Flushing to feel at last  
The silence over-past,  
Thrilling as tho' her hand had touched God's hand.  
But in the end how many words  
Winged on a flight she could not follow,  
Farther than skyward lark or swallow,  
His lips should free to lands she never knew;  
Braver than white sea-faring birds  
With a fearless melody,  
Flying over a shining sea,  
A star-white song between the blue and blue.

Oh I have seen a lake as clear and fair  
As it were molten air,  
Lifting a lily upward to the sun.  
How should the water know the glowing heart  
That ever to the heaven lifts its fire,



## RIVERS TO THE SEA

A golden and unchangeable desire?  
The water only knows  
The faint and rosy glows  
Of under-petals, opening apart.  
Yet in the soul of earth,  
Deep in the primal ground,  
Its searching roots are wound,  
And centuries have struggled toward its birth.  
So, in the man who sings,  
All of the voiceless horde  
From the cold dawn of things  
Have their reward;  
All in whose pulses ran  
Blood that is his at last,  
From the first stooping man  
Far in the winnowed past.  
Out of the tumult of their love and mating  
Each one created, seeing life was good —  
Dumb, till at last the song that they were waiting  
Breaks like brave April thru a wintry wood.

## RIVERS TO THE SEA

But what of her whose heart is troubled by it,  
The mother who would soothe and set him free,  
Fearing the song's storm-shaken ecstasy —  
Oh, as the moon that has no power to quiet  
The strong wind-driven sea.

IN MEMORIAM F. O. S.

You go a long and lovely journey,  
For all the stars, like burning dew,  
Are luminous and luring footprints  
Of souls adventurous as you.

Oh, if you lived on earth elated,  
How is it now that you can run  
Free of the weight of flesh and faring  
Far past the birthplace of the sun?

## TWILIGHT

THE stately tragedy of dusk  
Drew to its perfect close,  
The virginal white evening star  
Sank, and the red moon rose.

## SWALLOW FLIGHT

I LOVE my hour of wind and light,  
I love men's faces and their eyes,  
I love my spirit's veering flight  
Like swallows under evening skies.

## THOUGHTS

WHEN I can make my thoughts come forth  
To walk like ladies up and down,  
Each one puts on before the glass  
Her most becoming hat and gown.

But oh, the shy and eager thoughts  
That hide and will not get them dressed,  
Why is it that they always seem  
So much more lovely than the rest?

## TO DICK, ON HIS SIXTH BIRTHDAY

THO' I am very old and wise,  
And you are neither wise nor old,  
When I look far into your eyes,  
I know things I was never told:  
I know how flame must strain and fret  
Prisoned in a mortal net;  
How joy with over-eager wings,  
Bruises the small heart where he sings;  
How too much life, like too much gold,  
Is sometimes very hard to hold. . . .  
All that is talking — but I know  
This much is true, six years ago  
An angel living near the moon  
Walked thru the sky and sang a tune  
Plucking stars to make his crown —  
And suddenly two stars fell down,  
Two falling arrows made of light.  
Six years ago this very night

## RIVERS TO THE SEA

I saw them fall and wondered why  
The angel dropped them from the sky  
But when I saw your eyes I knew  
The angel sent the stars to you.



## TO ROSE

ROSE, when I remember you,  
Little lady, scarcely two,  
I am suddenly aware  
Of the angels in the air.  
All your softly gracious ways  
Make an island in my days  
Where my thoughts fly back to be  
Sheltered from too strong a sea.  
All your luminous delight  
Shines before me in the night  
When I grope for sleep and find  
Only shadows in my mind.

Rose, when I remember you,  
White and glowing, pink and new,  
With so swift a sense of fun  
Altho' life has just begun ;

## RIVERS TO THE SEA

With so sure a pride of place  
In your very infant face,  
I should like to make a prayer  
To the angels in the air :  
“If an angel ever brings  
Me a baby in her wings,  
Please be certain that it grows  
Very, very much like Rose.”

## THE FOUNTAIN

ON in the deep blue night  
The fountain sang alone ;  
It sang to the drowsy heart  
Of the satyr carved in stone.

The fountain sang and sang  
But the satyr never stirred —  
Only the great white moon  
In the empty heaven heard.

The fountain sang and sang  
And on the marble rim  
The milk-white peacocks slept,  
Their dreams were strange and dim.

Bright dew was on the grass,  
And on the ilex dew,  
The dreamy milk-white birds  
Were all a-glisten too.

## RIVERS TO THE SEA

The fountain sang and sang  
The things one cannot tell,  
The dreaming peacocks stirred  
And the gleaming dew-drops fell.

## THE ROSE

BENEATH my chamber window

Pierrot was singing, singing ;

I heard his lute the whole night thru

Until the east was red.

Alas, alas, Pierrot,

I had no rose for flinging

Save one that drank my tears for dew

Before its leaves were dead.

I found it in the darkness,

I kissed it once and threw it,

The petals scattered over him,

His song was turned to joy ;

And he will never know —

Alas, the one who knew it! —

The rose was plucked when dusk was dim

Beside a laughing boy.

## DREAMS

I GAVE my life to another lover,  
I gave my love, and all, and all —  
But over a dream the past will hover,  
Out of a dream the past will call.

I tear myself from sleep with a shiver  
But on my breast a kiss is hot,  
And by my bed the ghostly giver  
Is waiting tho' I see him not.

## “I AM NOT YOURS”

I AM not yours, not lost in you,  
Not lost, altho' I long to be  
Lost as a candle lit at noon,  
Lost as a snow-flake in the sea.

You love me, and I find you still  
A spirit beautiful and bright,  
Yet I am I, who long to be  
Lost as a light is lost in light.

Oh plunge me deep in love — put out  
My senses, leave me deaf and blind,  
Swept by the tempest of your love,  
A taper in a rushing wind.

## PIERROT'S SONG

*(For a picture by Dugald Walker)*

LADY, light in the east hangs low,  
Draw your veils of dream apart,  
Under the casement stands Pierrot  
Making a song to ease his heart.  
(Yet do not break the song too soon —  
I love to sing in the paling moon.)

The petals are falling, heavy with dew,  
The stars have fainted out of the sky,  
Come to me, come, or else I too,  
Faint with the weight of love will die.  
(She comes — alas, I hoped to make  
Another stanza for her sake !)



## NIGHT IN ARIZONA

THE moon is a charring ember  
Dying into the dark ;  
Off in the crouching mountains  
Coyotes bark.

The stars are heavy in heaven,  
Too great for the sky to hold —  
What if they fell and shattered  
The earth with gold ?

No lights are over the mesa,  
The wind is hard and wild,  
I stand at the darkened window  
And cry like a child.

## DUSK IN WAR TIME

A HALF-HOUR more and you will lean

To gather me close in the old sweet way —

But oh, to the woman over the sea

Who will come at the close of day?

A half-hour more and I will hear

The key in the latch and the strong quick  
tread —

But oh, the woman over the sea

Waiting at dusk for one who is dead!

## SPRING IN WAR TIME

I FEEL the Spring far off, far off,  
The faint far scent of bud and leaf —  
Oh how can Spring take heart to come  
To a world in grief,  
Deep grief?

The sun turns north, the days grow long,  
Later the evening star grows bright —  
How can the daylight linger on  
For men to fight,  
Still fight?

The grass is waking in the ground,  
Soon it will rise and blow in waves —  
How can it have the heart to sway  
Over the graves,  
New graves?

## RIVERS TO THE SEA

Under the boughs where lovers walked

The apple-blooms will shed their breath

But what of all the lovers now

Parted by death,

Gray Death?

## WHILE I MAY

WIND and hail and veering rain,  
Driven mist that veils the day,  
Soul's distress and body's pain,  
I would bear you while I may.

I would love you if I might,  
For so soon my life will be  
Buried in a lasting night,  
Even pain denied to me.

## DEBT

WHAT do I owe to you  
Who loved me deep and long?  
You never gave my spirit wings  
Or gave my heart a song.

But oh, to him I loved  
Who loved me not at all,  
I owe the little open gate  
That led thru heaven's wall.

## FROM THE NORTH

THE northern woods are delicately sweet,  
The lake is folded softly by the shore,  
But I am restless for the subway's roar,  
The thunder and the hurrying of feet.  
I try to sleep, but still my eyelids beat  
Against the image of the tower that bore  
Me high aloft, as if thru heaven's door  
I watched the world from God's unshaken seat.  
I would go back and breathe with quickened sense  
The tunnel's strong hot breath of powdered  
steel;  
But at the ferries I should leave the tense  
Dark air behind, and I should mount and be  
One among many who are thrilled to feel  
The first keen sea-breath from the open sea.

## THE LIGHTS OF NEW YORK

THE lightning spun your garment for the night

Of silver filaments with fire shot thru,

A broidery of lamps that lit for you

The steadfast splendor of enduring light.

The moon drifts dimly in the heaven's height,

Watching with wonder how the earth she knew

That lay so long wrapped deep in dark and dew,  
Should wear upon her breast a star so white.

The festivals of Babylon were dark

With flaring flambeaux that the wind blew  
down;

The Saturnalia were a wild boy's lark

With rain-quenched torches dripping thru the  
town —

But you have found a god and filched from him

A fire that neither wind nor rain can dim.



## SEA LONGING

A THOUSAND miles beyond this sun-steeped wall  
Somewhere the waves creep cool along the sand,  
The ebbing tide forsakes the listless land  
With the old murmur, long and musical;  
The windy waves mount up and curve and fall,  
And round the rocks the foam blows up like  
snow, —

Tho' I am inland far, I hear and know,  
For I was born the sea's eternal thrall.  
I would that I were there and over me  
The cold insistence of the tide would roll,  
Quenching this burning thing men call the  
soul, —

Then with the ebbing I should drift and be  
Less than the smallest shell along the shoal,  
Less than the sea-gulls calling to the sea.

## THE RIVER

I CAME from the sunny valleys  
And sought for the open sea,  
For I thought in its gray expanses  
My peace would come to me.

I came at last to the ocean  
And found it wild and black,  
And I cried to the windless valleys,  
“Be kind and take me back !”

But the thirsty tide ran inland,  
And the salt waves drank of me,  
And I who was fresh as the rainfall  
Am bitter as the sea.

## LEAVES

ONE by one, like leaves from a tree,  
All my faiths have forsaken me;  
But the stars above my head  
Burn in white and delicate red,  
And beneath my feet the earth  
Brings the sturdy grass to birth.  
I who was content to be  
But a silken-singing tree,  
But a rustle of delight  
In the wistful heart of night —  
I have lost the leaves that knew  
Touch of rain and weight of dew.  
Blinded by a leafy crown  
I looked neither up nor down —  
But the little leaves that die  
Have left me room to see the sky;  
Now for the first time I know  
Stars above and earth below.

## THE ANSWER

WHEN I go back to earth  
And all my joyous body  
Puts off the red and white  
That once had been so proud,  
If men should pass above  
With false and feeble pity,  
My dust will find a voice  
To answer them aloud :

“Be still, I am content,  
Take back your poor compassion,  
Joy was a flame in me  
Too steady to destroy ;  
Lithe as a bending reed  
Loving the storm that sways her -  
I found more joy in sorrow  
Than you could find in joy.”



### III



## OVER THE ROOFS

### I

Oh chimes set high on the sunny tower

Ring on, ring on unendingly,

Make all the hours a single hour,

For when the dusk begins to flower,

The man I love will come to me! . . .

But no, go slowly as you will,

I should not bid you hasten so,

For while I wait for love to come,

Some other girl is standing dumb,

Fearing her love will go.

### II

Oh white steam over the roofs, blow high!

Oh chimes in the tower ring clear and free

Oh sun awake in the covered sky,

For the man I love, loves me! . . .



## RIVERS TO THE SEA

Oh drifting steam disperse and die,  
Oh tower stand shrouded toward the south, —  
Fate heard afar my happy cry,  
And laid her finger on my mouth.

### III

The dusk was blue with blowing mist,  
The lights were spangles in a veil,  
And from the clamor far below  
Floated faint music like a wail.

It voiced what I shall never speak,  
My heart was breaking all night long,  
But when the dawn was hard and gray,  
My tears distilled into a song.

### IV

I said, "I have shut my heart  
As one shuts an open door,  
That Love may starve therein  
And trouble me no more."

## RIVERS TO THE SEA

But over the roofs there came  
The wet new wind of May,  
And a tune blew up from the curb  
Where the street-pianos play.

My room was white with the sun  
And Love cried out in me,  
"I am strong, I will break your heart  
Unless you set me free."

## A CRY

Oh, there are eyes that he can see,  
And hands to make his hands rejoice,  
But to my lover I must be  
Only a voice.

Oh, there are breasts to bear his head,  
And lips whereon his lips can lie,  
But I must be till I am dead  
Only a cry.

## CHANCE

How many times we must have met  
Here on the street as strangers do,  
Children of chance we were, who passed  
The door of heaven and never knew.

## IMMORTAL

So soon my body will have gone  
    Beyond the sound and sight of men,  
And tho' it wakes and suffers now,  
    Its sleep will be unbroken then ;  
But oh, my frail immortal soul  
    That will not sleep forevermore,  
A leaf borne onward by the blast,  
    A wave that never finds the shore.

## AFTER DEATH

Now while my lips are living  
    Their words must stay unsaid,  
And will my soul remember  
    To speak when I am dead?

Yet if my soul remembered  
    You would not heed it, dear,  
For now you must not listen,  
    And then you could not hear.

## TESTAMENT

I SAID, "I will take my life  
And throw it away ;  
I who was fire and song  
Will turn to clay."

"I will lie no more in the night  
With shaken breath,  
I will toss my heart in the air  
To be caught by Death."

But out of the night I heard,  
Like the inland sound of the sea,  
The hushed and terrible sob  
Of all humanity.

Then I said, "Oh who am I  
To scorn God to his face?  
I will bow my head and stay  
And suffer with my race."

## GIFTS

I GAVE my first love laughter,  
I gave my second tears,  
I gave my third love silence  
Thru all the years.

My first love gave me singing,  
My second eyes to see,  
But oh, it was my third love  
Who gave my soul to me.





## IV



## FROM THE SEA

ALL beauty calls you to me, and you seem,  
Past twice a thousand miles of shifting sea,  
To reach me. You are as the wind I breathe  
Here on the ship's sun-smitten topmost deck,  
With only light between the heavens and me.  
I feel your spirit and I close my eyes,  
Knowing the bright hair blowing in the sun,  
The eager whisper and the searching eyes.

\* \* \* \* \*

Listen, I love you. Do not turn your face  
Nor touch me. Only stand and watch awhile  
The blue unbroken circle of the sea.  
Look far away and let me ease my heart  
Of words that beat in it with broken wings.  
Look far away, and if I say too much,  
Forget that I am speaking. Only watch,  
How like a gull that sparkling sinks to rest,

## RIVERS TO THE SEA

The foam-crest drifts along a happy wave  
Toward the bright verge, the boundary of the world.

\* \* \* \* \*

I am so weak a thing, praise me for this,  
That in some strange way I was strong enough  
To keep my love unuttered and to stand  
Altho' I longed to kneel to you that night  
You looked at me with ever-calling eyes.  
Was I not calm? And if you guessed my love  
You thought it something delicate and free,  
Soft as the sound of fir-trees in the wind,  
Fleeting as phosphorescent stars in foam.  
Yet in my heart there was a beating storm  
Bending my thoughts before it, and I strove  
To say too little lest I say too much,  
And from my eyes to drive love's happy shame.  
Yet when I heard your name the first far time  
It seemed like other names to me, and I  
Was all unconscious, as a dreaming river  
That nears at last its long predestined sea;

## RIVERS TO THE SEA

And when you spoke to me, I did not know  
That to my life's high altar came its priest.  
But now I know between my God and me  
You stand forever, nearer God than I,  
And in your hands with faith and utter joy  
I would that I could lay my woman's soul.

\* \* \* \* \*

Oh, my love  
To whom I cannot come with any gift  
Of body or of soul, I pass and go.  
But sometimes when you hear blown back to you  
My wistful, far-off singing touched with tears,  
Know that I sang for you alone to hear,  
And that I wondered if the wind would bring  
To him who tuned my heart its distant song.  
So might a woman who in loneliness  
Had borne a child, dreaming of days to come,  
Wonder if it would please its father's eyes.  
But long before I ever heard your name,  
Always the undertone's unchanging note

## RIVERS TO THE SEA

In all my singing had prefigured you,  
Foretold you as a spark foretells a flame.  
Yet I was free as an untethered cloud  
In the great space between the sky and sea,  
And might have blown before the wind of joy  
Like a bright banner woven by the sun.  
I did not know the longing in the night —  
You who have waked me cannot give me sleep.  
All things in all the world can rest, but I,  
Even the smooth brief respite of a wave  
When it gives up its broken crown of foam,  
Even that little rest I may not have.  
And yet all quiet loves of friends, all joy  
In all the piercing beauty of the world  
I would give up — go blind forevermore,  
Rather than have God blot from out my soul  
Remembrance of your voice that said my name.

\* \* \* \* \*

For us no starlight stilled the April fields,  
No birds awoke in darkling trees for us,

## RIVERS TO THE SEA

Yet where we walked the city's street that night  
Felt in our feet the singing fire of spring,  
And in our path we left a trail of light  
Soft as the phosphorescence of the sea  
When night submerges in the vessel's wake  
A heaven of unborn evanescent stars.



## VIGNETTES OVERSEAS

### I

#### *Off Gibraltar*

BEYOND the sleepy hills of Spain,  
The sun goes down in yellow mist,  
The sky is fresh with dewy stars  
Above a sea of amethyst.

Yet in the city of my love  
High noon burns all the heavens bare —  
For him the happiness of light,  
For me a delicate despair.

### II

#### *Off Algiers*

Oh give me neither love nor tears,  
Nor dreams that sear the night with fire,  
Go lightly on your pilgrimage  
Unburdened by desire.

## RIVERS TO THE SEA

Forget me for a month, a year,  
But, oh, beloved, think of me  
When unexpected beauty burns  
Like sudden sunlight on the sea.

### III

#### *Naples*

Nisida and Prosida are laughing in the light,  
Capri is a dewy flower lifting into sight,  
Posilipo kneels and looks in the burnished sea,  
Naples crowds her million roofs close as close can  
be ;  
Round about the mountain's crest a flag of smoke  
is hung —  
Oh when God made Italy he was gay and young !

### IV

#### *Capri*

When beauty grows too great to bear  
How shall I ease me of its ache,

## RIVERS TO THE SEA

For beauty more than bitterness  
Makes the heart break.

Now while I watch the dreaming sea  
With isles like flowers against her breast,  
Only one voice in all the world  
Could give me rest.

### V

#### *Night Song at Amalfi*

I asked the heaven of stars  
What I should give my love —  
It answered me with silence,  
Silence above.

I asked the darkened sea  
Down where the fishers go —  
It answered me with silence,  
Silence below.

Oh, I could give him weeping,  
Or I could give him song —

## RIVERS TO THE SEA

But how can I give silence  
My whole life long?

## VI

### *Ruins of Paestum*

On lowlands where the temples lie  
The marsh-grass mingles with the flowers,  
Only the little songs of birds  
Link the unbroken hours.  
So in the end, above my heart  
Once like the city wild and gay,  
The slow white stars will pass by night,  
The swift brown birds by day.

## VII

### *Rome*

Oh for the rising moon  
Over the roofs of Rome,  
And swallows in the dusk  
Circling a darkened dome!

## RIVERS TO THE SEA

Oh for the measured dawns  
That pass with folded wings —  
How can I let them go  
With unremembered things?

## VIII

### *Florence*

The bells ring over the Arno,  
Midnight, the long, long chime;  
Here in the quivering darkness  
I am afraid of time.  
Oh, gray bells cease your tolling,  
Time takes too much from me,  
And yet to rock and river  
He gives eternity.

## IX

### *Villa Serbelloni, Bellaggio*

The fountain shivers lightly in the rain,  
The laurels drip, the fading roses fall,

## RIVERS TO THE SEA

The marble satyr plays a mournful strain  
That leaves the rainy fragrance musical.

Oh dripping laurel, Phœbus sacred tree,  
Would that swift Daphne's lot might come to  
me,  
Then would I still my soul and for an hour  
Change to a laurel in the glancing shower.

## X

### *Stresa*

The moon grows out of the hills  
A yellow flower,  
The lake is a dreamy bride  
Who waits her hour.

Beauty has filled my heart,  
It can hold no more,  
It is full, as the lake is full,  
From shore to shore.

## RIVERS TO THE SEA

### XI

#### *Hamburg*

The day that I come home,  
What will you find to say, —  
Words as light as foam  
With laughter light as spray?

Yet say what words you will  
The day that I come home;  
I shall hear the whole deep ocean  
Beating under the foam.

**V**

**SAPPHO**





## SAPPHO

### I

MIDNIGHT, and in the darkness not a sound,  
So, with hushed breathing, sleeps the autumn  
night;

Only the white immortal stars shall know,  
Here in the house with the low-lintelled door,  
How, for the last time, I have lit the lamp.  
I think you are not wholly careless now,  
Walls that have sheltered me so many an hour,  
Bed that has brought me ecstasy and sleep,  
Floors that have borne me when a gale of joy  
Lifted my soul and made me half a god.  
Farewell! Across the threshold many feet  
Shall pass, but never Sappho's feet again.  
Girls shall come in whom love has made aware  
Of all their swaying beauty — they shall sing,

## RIVERS TO THE SEA

But never Sappho's voice, like golden fire,  
Shall seek for heaven thru your echoing rafters.  
There shall be swallows bringing back the spring  
Over the long blue meadows of the sea,  
And south-wind playing on the reeds of rain,  
But never Sappho's whisper in the night,  
Never her love-cry when the lover comes.  
Farewell! I close the door and make it fast.

\* \* \* \* \*

The little street lies meek beneath the moon,  
Running, as rivers run, to meet the sea.  
I too go seaward and shall not return.  
Oh garlands on the doorposts that I pass,  
Woven of asters and of autumn leaves,  
I make a prayer for you: Cypris be kind,  
That every lover may be given love.  
I shall not hasten lest the paving stones  
Should echo with my sandals and awake  
Those who are warm beneath the cloak of sleep,  
Lest they should rise and see me and should say,

## RIVERS TO THE SEA

"Whither goes Sappho lonely in the night?"  
Whither goes Sappho? Whither all men go,  
But they go driven, straining back with fear,  
And Sappho goes as lightly as a leaf  
Blown from brown autumn forests to the sea.

\* \* \* \* \*

Here on the rock Zeus lifted from the waves,  
I shall await the waking of the dawn,  
Lying beneath the weight of dark as one  
Lies breathless, till the lover shall awake.  
And with the sun the sea shall cover me —  
I shall be less than the dissolving foam  
Murmuring and melting on the ebbing tide;  
I shall be less than spindrift, less than shells;  
And yet I shall be greater than the gods,  
For destiny no more can bow my soul  
As rain bows down the watch-fires on the hills.  
Yea, if my soul escape it shall aspire  
To the white heaven as flame that has its will.  
I go not bitterly, not dumb with pain,

## RIVERS TO THE SEA

Not broken by the ache of love — I go  
As one grown tired lies down and hopes to sleep.  
Yet they shall say: "It was for Cercolas;  
She died because she could not bear her love."  
They shall remember how we used to walk  
Here on the cliff beneath the oleanders  
In the long limpid twilight of the spring,  
Looking toward Lemnos, where the amber sky  
Was pierced with the faint arrow of a star.  
How should they know the wind of a new beauty  
Sweeping my soul had winnowed it with song?  
I have been glad tho' love should come or go,  
Happy as trees that find a wind to sway them,  
Happy again when it has left them rest.  
Others shall say, "Grave Dica wrought her death.  
She would not lift her lips to take a kiss,  
Or ever lift her eyes to take a smile.  
She was a pool the winter paves with ice  
That the wild hunter in the hills must leave  
With thirst unslaked in the brief southward sun.'

## RIVERS TO THE SEA

Ah Dica, it is not for thee I go ;  
And not for Phaon, tho' his ship lifts sail  
Here in the windless harbor for the south.  
Oh, darkling deities that guard the Nile,  
Watch over one whose gods are far away.  
Egypt, be kind to him, his eyes are deep —  
Yet they are wrong who say it was for him.  
How should they know that Sappho lived and  
died

Faithful to love, not faithful to the lover,  
Never transfused and lost in what she loved,  
Never so wholly loving nor at peace.  
I asked for something greater than I found,  
And every time that love has made me weep,  
I have rejoiced that love could be so strong ;  
For I have stood apart and watched my soul  
Caught in the gust of passion, as a bird  
With baffled wings against the dusty whirlwind  
Struggles and frees itself to find the sky.  
It is not for a single god I go ;

## RIVERS TO THE SEA

I have grown weary of the winds of heaven.  
I will not be a reed to hold the sound  
Of whatsoever breath the gods may blow,  
Turning my torment into music for them.  
They gave me life; the gift was bountiful,  
I lived with the swift singing strength of fire,  
Seeking for beauty as a flame for fuel —  
Beauty in all things and in every hour.  
The gods have given life — I gave them song;  
The debt is paid and now I turn to go.

\* \* \* \* \*

The breath of dawn blows the stars out like lamps,  
There is a rim of silver on the sea,  
As one grown tired who hopes to sleep, I go.

## II

Oh Litis, little slave, why will you sleep?  
These long Egyptian noons bend down your head  
Bowed like the yarrow with a yellow bee.  
There, lift your eyes no man has ever kindled,

## RIVERS TO THE SEA

Dark eyes that wait like faggots for the fire.  
See how the temple's solid square of shade  
Points north to Lesbos, and the splendid sea  
That you have never seen, oh evening-eyed.  
Yet have you never wondered what the Nile  
Is seeking always, restless and wild with spring  
And no less in the winter, seeking still?  
How shall I tell you? Can you think of fields  
Greater than Gods could till, more blue than  
    night

Sown over with the stars; and delicate  
With filmy nets of foam that come and go?  
It is more cruel and more compassionate  
Than harried earth. It takes with unconcern  
And quick forgetting, rapture of the rain  
And agony of thunder, the moon's white  
Soft-garmented virginity, and then  
The insatiable ardor of the sun.  
And me it took. But there is one more strong,  
Love, that came laughing from the elder seas,



## RIVERS TO THE SEA

The Cyprian, the mother of the world ;  
She gave me love who only asked for death —  
I who had seen much sorrow in men's eyes  
And in my own too sorrowful a fire.  
I was a sister of the stars, and yet  
Shaken with pain ; sister of birds and yet  
The wings that bore my soul were very tired.  
I watched the careless spring too many times  
Light her green torches in a hungry wind ;  
Too many times I watched them flare, and then  
Fall to forsaken embers in the autumn.  
And I was sick of all things — even song.  
In the dull autumn dawn I turned to death,  
Buried my living body in the sea,  
The strong cold sea that takes and does not  
give —  
But there is one more strong, the Cyprian.  
Litis, to wake from sleep and find your eyes  
Met in their first fresh upward gaze by love,  
Filled with love's happy shame from other eyes,

## RIVERS TO THE SEA

Dazzled with tenderness and drowned in light  
As tho' you looked unthinking at the sun,  
Oh Litis, that is joy! But if you came  
Not from the sunny shallow pool of sleep,  
But from the sea of death, the strangling sea  
Of night and nothingness, and waked to find  
Love looking down upon you, glad and still,  
Strange and yet known forever, that is peace.  
So did he lean above me. Not a word  
He spoke; I only heard the morning sea  
Singing against his happy ship, the keen  
And straining joy of wind-awakened sails  
And songs of mariners, and in myself  
The precious pain of arms that held me fast.  
They warmed the cold sea out of all my blood;  
I slept, feeling his eyes above my sleep.  
There on the ship with wines and olives laden,  
Led by the stars to far invisible ports,  
Egypt and islands of the inner seas,  
Love came to me, and Cercolas was love.

## RIVERS TO THE SEA

### III<sup>1</sup>

The twilight's inner flame grows blue and deep,  
And in my Lesbos, over leagues of sea,  
The temples glimmer moon-wise in the trees.  
Twilight has veiled the little flower-face  
Here on my heart, but still the night is kind  
And leaves her warm sweet weight against my breast.  
Am I that Sappho who would run at dusk  
Along the surges creeping up the shore  
When tides came in to ease the hungry beach,  
And running, running till the night was black,  
Would fall forespent upon the chilly sand  
And quiver with the winds from off the sea?  
Ah quietly the shingle waits the tides  
Whose waves are stinging kisses, but to me  
Love brought no peace, nor darkness any rest.  
I crept and touched the foam with fevered hands  
And cried to Love, from whom the sea is sweet,  
From whom the sea is bitterer than death.

<sup>1</sup> From "Helen of Troy and Other Poems."

## RIVERS TO THE SEA

Ah, Aphrodite, if I sing no more  
To thee, God's daughter, powerful as God,  
It is that thou hast made my life too sweet  
To hold the added sweetness of a song.  
There is a quiet at the heart of love,  
And I have pierced the pain and come to peace.  
I hold my peace, my Cleïs, on my heart;  
And softer than a little wild bird's wing  
Are kisses that she pours upon my mouth.  
Ah never any more when spring like fire  
Will flicker in the newly opened leaves,  
Shall I steal forth to seek for solitude  
Beyond the lure of light Alcæus' lyre,  
Beyond the sob that stilled Erinna's voice.  
Ah, never with a throat that aches with song,  
Beneath the white uncaring sky of spring,  
Shall I go forth to hide awhile from Love  
The quiver and the crying of my heart.  
Still I remember how I strove to flee  
The love-note of the birds, and bowed my head

## RIVERS TO THE SEA

To hurry faster, but upon the ground  
I saw two wingèd shadows side by side,  
And all the world's spring passion stifled me.  
Ah, Love there is no fleeing from thy might,  
No lonely place where thou hast never trod,  
No desert thou hast left uncarpeted  
With flowers that spring beneath thy perfect feet.  
In many guises didst thou come to me;  
I saw thee by the maidens while they danced,  
Phaon allured me with a look of thine,  
In Anactoria I knew thy grace,  
I looked at Cercolas and saw thine eyes;  
But never wholly, soul and body mine,  
Didst thou bid any love me as I loved.  
Now have I found the peace that fled from me;  
Close, close against my heart I hold my world.  
Ah, Love that made my life a lyric cry,  
Ah, Love that tuned my lips to lyres of thine,  
I taught the world thy music, now alone  
I sing for one who falls asleep to hear.

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